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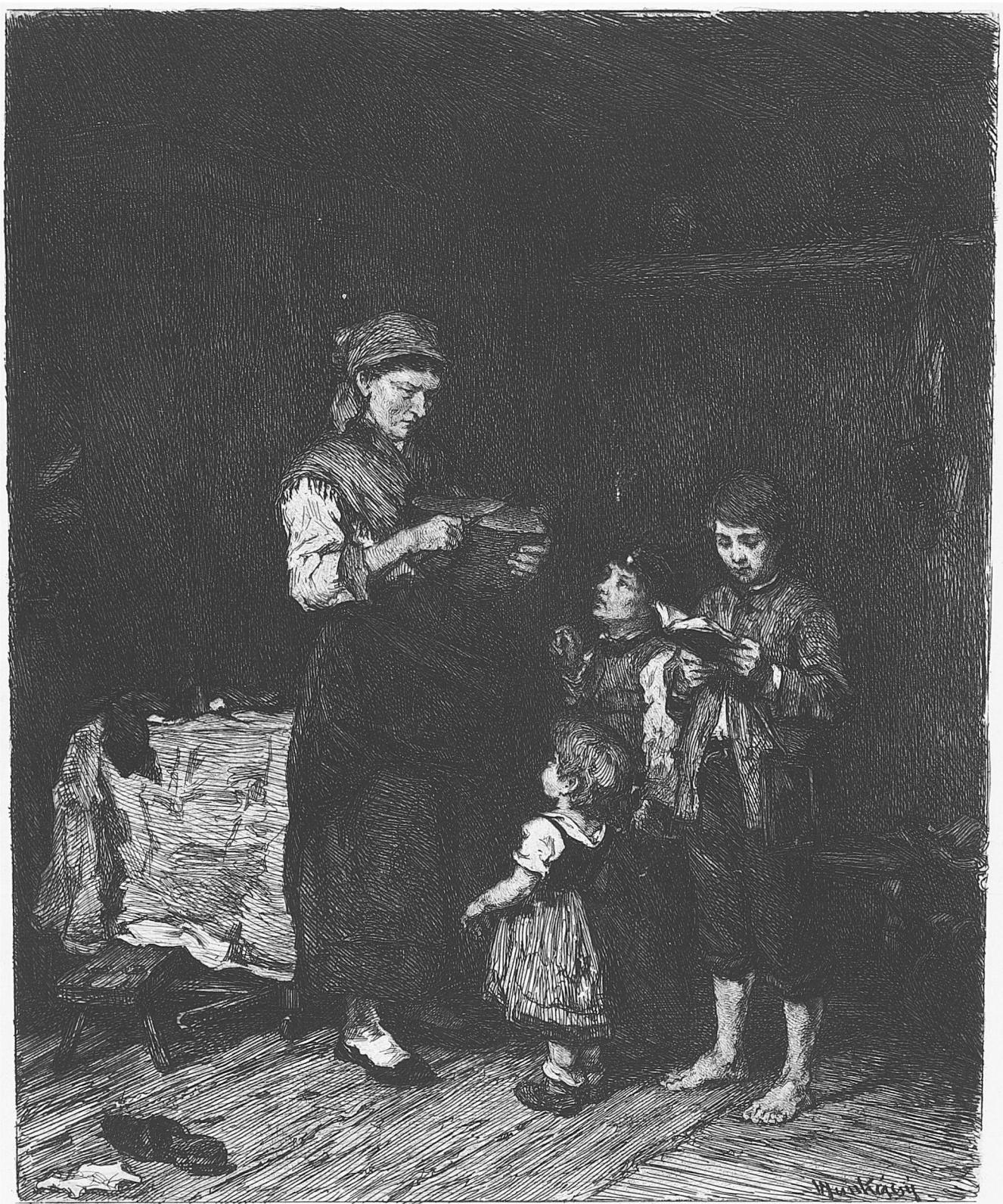
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MICHAEL MUNKÁCSY.

FIRST ARTICLE.



M. MUNKÁCSY.

ENGRAVED BY W. B. CLOSSON.—FROM A PHOTOGRAPH BY KLÖSZ, BUDA-PESTH.

Régnault followed his equestrian *Portrait of Prim*, of the preceding year, with the dazzling, wicked beauty of his *Salomé*. Zamacoïs unconsciously foreshadowed the coming *baptême de feu* by his charming anecdote, *The Education of a Prince*, and Munkácsy's art drew crowds around his sombre and tragic *Last Day of the Condemned*. Fortuny, who never entered the lists of the Salon, was nevertheless filling Paris with his fame, and with rumors of the fabulous sums paid for his pictures. Of all these brilliant youths, but one is left. On Régnault's early tomb the soldier's laurel mingle with the painter's wreath. Both gifted Spaniards are dead. Munkácsy alone, fulfilling the bright promise he then gave, remains.

THE balmy spring months which ushered in the summer of 1870 gave no visible premonitions of the sinister events which so soon after desolated many, and ravished two, of the fairest provinces of France. Paris was never more light-hearted, the Boulevards were never brighter, and the trees in the Elysian Fields and the Boulogne Wood never shone with dewier or more fragrant blossoms. A new era of prosperity and progress seemed about to begin. The Emperor had placed the reins of government in the hands of a liberal Ministry, and liberal ideas invaded even the hitherto autocratic Administration of the Fine Arts.

The Salon opened its doors under the hopeful auspices of the new departure. For the first time the exhibiting artists—those most interested—had the entire direction of the Exhibition, the formation of the jury, the hanging of the pictures, and the distribution of the recompenses. The walls of the Palais des Beaux-Arts presented a fine display of works, alphabetically arranged, and notably of masterpieces by young artists.

It is something of a coincidence that he should have made his *début* in art, as he did in existence, on the eve of war and revolution, of carnage and desolation.

Without going into details, which the writer has already sketched elsewhere,¹ it is necessary, nevertheless, in preparing the mind of the reader rightly to estimate the painter's work, to make him acquainted with the painter, and to note briefly the more important circumstances which have influenced for good and ill his intellectual development.

MUNKÁCSY MIHÁLY, as he signs his name,—according to the Hungarian custom of placing the baptismal appellation last,—was born on the 10th of October, 1846, at Munkács, a little town lying in the morning shadow of the Carpathian Mountains, on the banks of one of the tributaries of the Theiss, in the remote northeast of Hungary,—a town known hitherto in history only for its fortress, which the heroine Helena Zrinyi defended against the Austrian Marshal Caprara, and where for six years the noble Greek patriot Alexander Ypsilanti was imprisoned.

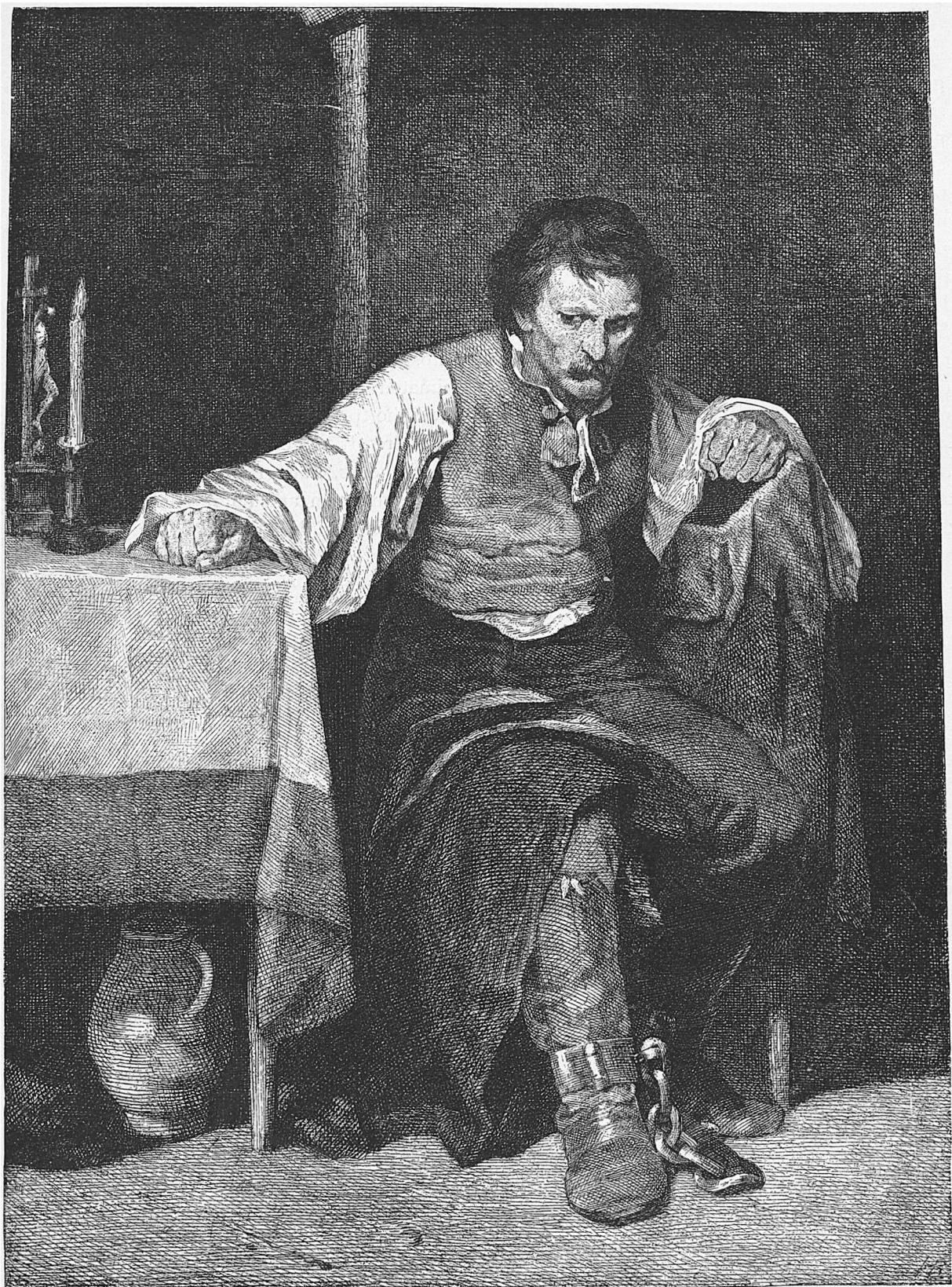
Like most of the grand painters of the centuries past, whose biographies contain “a legend, a romance, or at least a history,” Munkácsy’s career has been one of striking vicissitudes and strange adventures, and the story of his life would emulate in interest the most romantic of the sixteenth century. Left an orphan tragically in the midst of a great political revolution, before he had lived long enough to be able to remember his mother’s smile or his father’s protecting care,—growing up among peasants, doomed to early drudgery and dependent on the charity of an impoverished relative,—in a land remote from, in spite of its nearness to, the refinements of civilization,—it seems little short of miraculous that he should have ever dreamed of devoting himself to art. Yet, in spite of what would appear almost insurmountable hindrances, he not only recognized his vocation at once, but by force of faith and pluck made his way towards it. Few artists have ever risen so rapidly from obscurity to renown, and fewer still have enjoyed a recognition so spontaneous and universal. The distance between the apprentice, in the village joiner’s workshop in Bekes-Esaba, and the master, decorated and ennobled, in the most gorgeous studio of Paris, is immense; and the way was not travelled over a path of roses, or won without many a futile effort and painful fall. Although a conqueror, Munkácsy bears the scars of the difficult conflict, and the hardships he has endured have left an impression visible in his works and upon the man himself.

Edward King, in his *Hungarian Types and Austrian Pictures*, describes him as one whom the loungers on the Boulevard turn to stare after when he passes. “If he is not something exceptional, he ought to be!” they say to themselves. M. Sedelmeyer, of Paris, has presented to the Lenox Library of New York a bronze bust of him, by F. Beer, that may verify the impression. The features resemble somewhat those of Rembrandt,² but with more of refinement and revery in their expression. There is the same abundance of curling hair, the same crisp moustache and beard, the same indentation between the level eyebrows, above a somewhat broad nose, the same regard, tender and profound,—a face, one would say, full of energy, of observation and reflection. The bronze rather exaggerates the first of these qualities, and has less of the dreamy pensiveness which characterizes the original. The silver threads in the dark hair and the furrows on the brow of one barely in his thirty-fifth year, tell of the early struggles and discouragements, of the loneliness of a heart full of sympathy, and love, and noble aspirations.

Munkácsy is one of the few painters who, like the ideal poet, are born not made. As Pope is said to have lisped in numbers, as Giotto traced his earliest studies in the sand, so the “little Miska” made his first drawings, when a carpenter’s apprentice, on the boards he planed,—the

¹ *Lippincott’s Magazine*, February, 1879.

² “On le reconnaît à son nez gros et large; ses cheveux crépus sont épars et hérisrés tant au sommet qu’autour de la tête. . . . Il porte des petites moustaches et un barbe très courte qui a l’air d’un poil follet. Les sourcils froncés.” M. Charles Blanc, *L’Œuvre de Rembrandt*. Paris, 1880.



THE CONDEMNED MAN.

PRINCIPAL FIGURE IN THE "SIRALOMHÁZ," OWNED BY MRS. WILLSTACH, PHILADELPHIA.

PHOTOTYPIC REDUCTION OF AN ETCHING BY H. REDLICH.

REPRODUCED BY PERMISSION OF THE PUBLISHER, M. SEDELMEYER, PARIS.

village street his academy and Nature his teacher. Theophile Gautier remarks that the distinguishing characteristic of the born painter is an almost indifference to the theme of his compositions, a trait easily recognized in the young Hungarian. Guided by an instinct for the picturesque, he reproduced it wherever he saw it,—in still-life, in landscape, in the customs and costumes of the peasants about him; nothing was too high, nothing too base, for his pencil, which did not scorn the vulgar and recoiled not even before the horrible. His early designs, many of which he has preserved, were sketched with a simple vigor and naïve realism which reminds one of the engravings of Albert Dürer, and when not copied directly from nature invariably recorded an experience,—the terrors of an inundation or the merriment of a festival. His way onward has been marvellously rapid, when one thinks of his want of education and friends, of the interruptions of poverty, of illness, and even of threatened blindness, which for many months confined him to the shaded seclusion of a hospital. But even in darkness he avoided despair, and emerged self-reliant and persistent, animated by a consciousness of genius which never deserted him. It does not lie in the scope of the present article to follow the young student in his wanderings from one art centre to another. It suffices to know that step by step he overcame the hindrances, not merely of want of means, but of depreciation and neglect almost amounting to affronts at the hands of fellow-countrymen and fellow-students, who found amusement in his provincial appearance and broken speech, and ridiculed his proud, sad air, and the peculiarities even of his costume. Without groping or hesitation, almost without conscious study, certainly without the instruction of academies,—never for a moment erring in the footsteps of others, his spirit calm and thoughtful,—he pursued his way, easily distancing early competitors and becoming a master almost unawares.

The blackness of his pictures, the dull intensity and sultry harmony of his color, with which even friendly critics have reproached him, have led some of them to seek his models in the chiaroscuroists of the Dutch and Spanish schools, and one of them¹ accuses him of remaining faithful to "the conventionality that Rembrandt has made more true than Truth." The error of this assertion lies in ascribing to a theory evolved from study, what has been only a stage in the process of development, one of the many difficulties which the artist has had to surmount. If, as the critic continues, this obstinacy is "in spite of the new theories of open air, and effects *au grand soleil* which the naturalism of the day professes," it is because Munkácsy distrusted all theories, and, with the reserve born of conscious strength not less than of a modest estimate of it, refused to attempt the impossible. Among the pleasant souvenirs of the present writer is that of a stroll taken with him one July afternoon in the Parc Monceau. The day was brilliant, and the sward lay weltering in the sunlight which poured through the gaps in the foliage and lighted up the paths, glinting on the stone benches, and the gay dresses and parasols of the promenaders. One effect of transparent greenery called forth an appreciative exclamation which was damped immediately by the reply plaintively drawled out by Munkácsy: "Ja! reizend aber doch—unerreichbar!" (Yes! charming, but still—unattainable!) The twilight tones of his sombre palette have been partly the consequence of the sympathetic gloom of his subjects, and partly of an economy of his resources. In his work, as in his life, he has steadily travelled from darkness towards light, as day passes through the gradual development of dawn, until, as one of his French critics at last allows, he has "victorieusement sorti de sa cave," and his power as a colorist rests as undisputed as the judiciousness of his handling and the dramatic force of his composition.

Fortuny is reported by an intimate friend to have refused to look at pictures by Rubens, from the fear lest his independence might suffer from his admiration. Munkácsy has never been troubled with such hesitations. Following the intuitions of his genius alone, he has allowed himself to be as little influenced by his contemporaries as by his predecessors. It was not to exchange the old masters for the modern that he quitted Munich for Düsseldorf, for he had

¹ Émile Bergerat, in the *Journal Officiel*.



FROM "THE AFTERNOON TEA."

THE PICTURE IN THE COLLECTION OF MR. MORRIS K. JESSUP, NEW YORK.

PHOTOTYPIC REPRODUCTION OF A CRAYON SKETCH.

already arrived at the conviction that nature was the only master. The fact that Ludwig Knaus had his studio at that time in the latter city was no doubt the principal inducement for the change of residence; but the attraction was rather one of sympathy and admiration than of either the hope or desire of becoming a pupil of that amiable and genial painter, who was, however, among the first to appreciate the younger man's ability and to bid him welcome. While widely different in some respects, in others there is much that was similar in the careers of the two. Academical wise-acres had prophesied of both that they never would become painters. Both had suffered privations amounting to want of the actual necessities of life. Each made a sensational *début* with a picture of tragic interest, and both have lived to enjoy, while still young, wealth, honors, and the love and respect of friends. At that time, however, these coincidences were unrecognized,—were in part yet to happen; and had Munkácsy's direction been made at all subservient to that pursued by Knaus, who was then enthusiastically enamored of Watteau, it must certainly have resulted to the detriment of his development. Besides, gentle and docile as the young Hungarian was, he was already fixed in his convictions, and, confident in the intimations of his latent strength, waited only for the opportunity, which soon presented itself, to assert it. In fact, also, he was too much of a Magyar to follow where he felt empowered to lead. The wild spirit of freedom,

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the proud self-consciousness and patriotism which inspired Petöfi when he invoked his compatriots to "Remember the ancestors, conquerors of the world! A thousand years contemplate us—judge us—from Attila to Rakóczi!"—burned not less strongly in the as yet unknown young painter's bosom.

So far from becoming the pupil of any one, he almost immediately exerted a more potent and wide-spread influence in the ateliers than did either Knaus, Vautier, or Wilhelm Sohn. Nor was it the younger painters only who studied his processes and sought to imitate their results. The veteran Tidemand, not to speak of Albert Bauer, Carl Hoff, Hübner, and others, sat frequently watching at his elbow while he worked; and the most distinguished professor of the school, not finding him at home when he called, in his impatience to see the work so much extolled, condescended to ask admittance of the servant. Among those who profited by Munkácsy's example and instruction may be mentioned Munthe, who abandoned his former Düsseldorf manner entirely, and entered upon the path which has since led him to fame and fortune; and Gertz, who at the Universal Exposition of Vienna had some powerful pictures painted rather too much under the same inspiration.

The secret of Munkácsy's success is not to be found in his *technique*, original and attractive as it is; neither in the virtuosity of his handling, nor in the charm of his color, which has indeed been criticised, sometimes with reason, as black, sullied, and mannered. His pictures do not impose by their size,¹ like those of Makart, or win by the rendition of physical beauty, like those of Knaus; but their fascination lies in the subjectivity and the dramatic instinct of the painter, which pervade and give intensity to whatever he touches. Men are at last only interested in whatever impresses them with a sense of reality, and Munkácsy's paintings, like many of Dickens's descriptions, have all the verisimilitude of autobiography, and looking at them one feels he is "assisting" at something more than mere imaginary scenes. The figures are not phantoms,—are not only fresh and original, but typical, living, realized to the extent of illusion almost; and in every composition each one contributes, not merely in filling the space, but in telling the story of the canvas. The spectator becomes involuntarily in sympathy with the artist, in whose designs what has not been drawn from actual experience has at least been found in his heart. He has himself danced at the village games and wedding festivals, has wandered with vagabonds and strolling apprentices, has followed barefooted the drums which called out the conscripts to the war, has witnessed the joy over the returning, and listened to the wail for those who returned not. With his own hands he has gleaned with the reapers and toiled at the mechanic's bench, in his own person has suffered with the poor and sympathized with the sorrowing.

Even in his landscapes one may read something of his history. The earlier ones were recollections of home, of the *grandiose Puszta*,—the vast plain dear to the Magyar heart as the Alpine heights are to the Swiss mountaineer. He drew his inspiration from the boundless pastures where the *Csikós*, Bedouin-like, guards his droves of half-wild horses,—from the farm where the zephyrs toss the blonde ears and the shadows pursue each other over the fields of grain,—where the long arm stretches out in weird silhouette over deep wells, by whose margins the horned cattle collect at noon staring in the distance. He found his motives in the "melon-fertile" Steppen-sand, by the half-ruined *Czárda* where gypsies and vagabonds carouse, and in the birch thicket where the shy moor-hen builds her nest, undisturbed by clamorous children.² His more recent landscapes are the results of newer impressions. That with the washerwomen in the foreground, in Mr. Francis Bartlett's collection, is a bit of Luxembourg scenery, near Madame Munkácsy's château. The harvest scene which was exhibited at the Harper sale is another reminiscence of the same neighborhood, evidently a personal one, as the uncommon

¹ The figures in *Milton dictating Paradise Lost* make the impression of being life-size. In fact, they are only two thirds of it, but the realism of the painting amounts to optical illusion.

² Petöfi.

staffage—the elegantly attired lady and the patrician children tumbling in the hay—sufficiently indicates.

Realistic as his landscapes are, by the way, it is doubtful whether he ever made studies for them from nature. They are mental photographs less of actual views than of general impressions made upon one highly susceptible to the picturesque in every form, and endowed with a mind quick in the selection and wonderfully retentive of what is characteristic.

It is this personal identification with his work, the subjectivity which underlies it, that excites our sympathy and compels our interest. The *Studio Interior*, in which he has painted his own full-length portrait, psychologically considered, scarcely discloses more of himself than does the *Siralomház* (*Last Day of the Condemned Man*) or the *Shoemaker's Apprentice*; though with what contrast in the *mise en scène*!

In spite of this, and of the predilection he has shown for subjects of earnest, at times even of more than tragic purport, no one is further from being morbid in the least degree than Munkácsy. Of a sanguine-nervous temperament, his disposition is amiable and buoyant, though never boisterous. There is not one drop of gall in his heart, and, while keenly sensitive to injustice and wrong, he seems incapable of returning it with enmity.¹ One might easily be led to form an ideal of him from his works, assisted by his personal appearance, as a pensive dreamer fond of the solitude of a world peopled only with the creations of his imagination. But such an ideal would be utterly unlike the real Munkácsy. The physician who upon similar grounds fancied Grimaldi to be the happiest man in the world, was not more mistaken. No one is fonder of society and the haunts of men than the painter of *Milton*. In Düsseldorf he took dancing-lessons while he was at work on his tragedy of *The Condemned*, and one of the earliest investments he made of the first instalment of its price was to rent a fauteuil by the season at the theatre. At balls and parties he enjoyed himself to an

¹ Since the above was written, an anecdote has gone the rounds of the European press, which, "without attesting its truth," the *Athenaeum* of November 20th translates:—"Herr Munkácsy was not long ago walking in the streets of Carlsbad, when in the window of a picture-dealer's shop he noticed a horrible daub bearing his own name. Entering the shop he demanded of the proprietor his authority for naming the painting. An off-hand reply brought a few hot words from the artist, and, after these, 'with a vigorous shove he sent the Jew rolling to the bottom of the shop.' The police then appeared."

² Most of the sketches published with these articles are direct reproductions of the originals, kindly loaned for the purpose by M. Munkácsy.



FROM "THE TWO FAMILIES."²

EXHIBITED AT THE ROYAL ACADEMY, 1880.

PHOTOTYPIC REPRODUCTION OF A CRAYON SKETCH.

almost feminine degree, and at the "Malkasten" he shared in the wildest revelry without any other stimulant than the joyousness of his own nature. The Hungarians are drinkers, as a nation, to an extent which has been apologized for on the score of the vile taste of the water of the *Puszta*, which contains saltpetre and soda; and the practice of the German painters seems based upon the dictum of Luther: —

"Wer nicht liebt Wein, Weib und Gesang,
Der bleibt ein Narr sein Lebenlang."

Yet, despite the examples and temptations around him, Munkácsy rarely ever drank wine, still more seldom beer, and never spirits. Champagne indeed he was fond of, and would order with profuse hospitality on occasion; but having been introduced, on his first visit to Paris, to an American soda fountain in the Boulevard des Italiens, he seemed to find in that frothy compound a beverage that he liked equally well, if indeed he did not prefer it to the vintages of Ay and Mareuil.

Among other social talents which Munkácsy has cultivated, and in which he excels, are those of acting in private theatricals and prestidigitation. Every great man has his pet vanity. Knaus, for instance, took more pride in the strength of his arm and the circumference of his biceps than in anything else,—at least until his wife presented him with a male rosebud in his garden of girls. Alexandre Dumas and Rossini affected to be cooks *par excellence*. Leibl's weakness, like that of Knaus, is his physical strength, and Munkácsy's is conjuring; and the applause earned by some dexterous sleight of hand gives him more pleasure than any compliment paid to his painting.

Like the genuine Parisian that he has become, he rarely leaves Paris, except to make an occasional visit to the Château de Colpach, the country-seat near Metz which his wife inherited from her first husband, the Baron de Marches. He has the same "need of a world of men," of populous streets, that Charles Dickens suffered on account of at times, of which longing on one occasion Madame Munkácsy related an amusing illustration. On their wedding tour they visited Venice *en route* to Hungary, and the lady described the impression made upon her companion by the "Sea Cybele" as oppressive almost as a nightmare. On the night of their arrival, as their gondola threaded the labyrinth of silent canals, between miles of frowning palaces, Mihály cried out almost in agonizing tones to be taken back to human haunts,—anywhere,—where only living beings might be seen and heard.¹

Even at his easel he prefers companionship to solitude, and seems to find his imagination stimulated by what to most others would be an interruption. He is not with all his industry independent of moods, and at times has to wait on inspiration. The writer has seen him, more than once, lounging taciturn and reflective before his canvas the greater part of a day, retaining his visitor by plaintive remonstrances when he wished to depart, until; late in the afternoon, he would take up his palette, and in the few hours left him would easily complete his task.

As a workman Munkácsy is as thoroughly honest as he was bold and original from the first. No artist possesses a more marked individuality, while still avoiding mannerism. His execution is large and simple, judicious in the varying degrees with which he emphasizes one detail and subdues another, contenting itself at times with mere suggestions of design and conciseness of modelling, and at others employing an opulence of finish, yet giving in either case the same impression of easy facility. He models rather than draws with his brush. The objects on his canvas are without contours, only the colors have limits, and no one tone is isolated. He

¹ Paris charmed him from the first, and on his second visit there he wrote: "Existence in Düsseldorf appears to me so unbearable now that I must really pity you; and all the more, because I am so happy here that it even seems a wrong done to the friend who shared all the dull days, for me to be enjoying the bright ones alone." He was offered inducements to go to Berlin and Weimar, but as soon as it was possible to do so he removed his atelier to the world's capital, where he found a home so congenial as to justify almost the claim of Albert Wolff, in the *Figaro*,—"Munkácsy is a French painter, born in Hungary."

proceeds by large oppositions and contrasts daringly embracing, yet so melting into each other as to give value to every figure, and still surround them by an atmosphere at once harmonious and real. The skill with which he renders textures is also remarkable, without obtrusive imitation,—without any tricks of loading or scraping or deviation from the process broad and sure in which the entire picture is painted. He is a colorist more by the truth of his local tones and the science of their opposition, and the subtle appreciation of the values of the lights, than by any variety or brilliancy of his tints. While subdued, however, his color is rich internally. He was wont to say, "Die theuren Farben taugen alle nichts!" (All expensive colors are good for nothing!) and his palette was simple in the extreme, consisting principally of one or two ochres and reds between Himalayas of white and black. This economy of means and reserve of strength made his earlier pictures somewhat dark and monotonous, but resulted in a refinement of his grays, which is one of the most admirable of his qualities as a colorist, and in the power of employing more brilliant pigments with all the greater effect when he added them to his resources.

JOHN R. TAIT.



SLIGHT SKETCH FROM NATURE, MADE IN THE PARC MONCEAU.

IN THE POSSESSION OF THE AUTHOR.